

marcelo expósito
selected videos 1990-2010
descriptions and credits

familiar demons series:
books for stones
promised land
fight the dream

the mother's land
october in the north: storm from the northwest
having forgotten nothing

between dreams series:
first of may (the city-factory)
radical imagination (carnivals of resistance)
tactical frivolity + rhythms of resistance
not reconciled (nobody knows what a body is capable of)
143.353 (eyes do not want to be always shut)

Los Demonios Familiares:

(1) Los libros por las piedras

(2) Tierra prometida

(3) Combat del somni

Familiar demons:

(1) Books for stones (2)

Promised land (3)

Fight the Dream/

[Marcelo Expósito](#)

1990 - 1994

Los demonios familiares is the general title of a series (actually unfinished) of short works, which comprises three videos produced in the first half of the 1990s. This title makes reference to the writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán (whose book *Los demonios familiares de Franco* (Franco's familiar demons) is paid an indirect tribute to), who had underscored the disturbing expression with which General Franco did occasionally refer to the supposed fantasies of the Spanish character: anarchy, individualism, negative criticism, extremism...; and at other times, to its traditional historic demons: separatism, freemasonry, communism.

The project set out on a starting point common to all its parts: to construct short montage exercises with fragments of film from Francoist cinema, and relate these images to other heterogeneous visual and sound material. *Los libros por las piedras* (1990-91) features the film *Raza* (Race), directed by Sáenz de Heredia in 1941 and based on the book by the same title written by Jaime de Arade, which is the pseudonym of Francisco Franco himself. The last sequence of this film is thrown against images of a sober landscape in Maastricht filled with the tombstones of soldiers fallen during the Second World War, and images of the last refugees of the Spanish Civil War going through the French border. On the soundtrack, a religious pakistani hymn sung by female voices is underlined by the percussion rhythm of the banging on male chests. In *Tierra prometida* (1992) the scene of the arrival of Columbus' expedition to America, recreated archetypically in *Alba de América* (America's dawn), is interspersed with images of the spectacular bombing of 1973, with which ETA killed Admiral Carrero Blanco, who is said to have exercised a lot of influence in the production of *Alba de América*, and who died on the same exact day of the month, on which, twenty-two years earlier, the film was premiered. Other images of *Tierra prometida* include references to the execution by garrote of Salvador Puig Antich and Heinz Chez in 1974. In *Combat del somni* (1994), a quote by Rosa Luxemburg prefaces images of domestic Super 8 films of Francisco Franco that document the daily life of the régime's highest ranks (including images of the current royal family in situations of happy repose). The soundtrack features music by Frederic Mompou, statements by members of the POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista: Worker's Party for Marxist Unification) and Jaime Miravittles (the official responsible for propaganda and information at the Generalitat de Catalunya during the Civil War) extracted from the film *La vieja memoria* (Old memory), directed by Jaime Camino and Román Gubern in 1979. Other footage in the video

include the congressional speech with which Felipe González caused the PSOE party to relinquish Marxism (the same year in which *La vieja memoria* was made) and a paraphrase by Guy Debord (spectacle as “the guardian of a dream”).

The pieces that compose *Los demonios familiares* are surely primitive reconstructions of (bad) dreams (inspired by Christian Metz’s notion of film as an imaginary signifier and his ideas about the oniric character of the cinematic apparatus). The montage of these videos looks to effect a sense both of identification and alienation, using juxtapositions that recreate dream processes of condensation, projection and displacement. The pieces are coarse dreams, somewhere between history and myth, searching for valves through which to decompress the “collective unconscious” of the images of a country with a fragile memory.

Work composed by three parts:

1.-Los Libros por las Piedras.

Directed by: Marcelo Expósito

Production: Marcelo Expósito, Jan van Eyck Akademie (Maastricht), CIEJ (Barcelona)

Length: 05:40

Year: 1990-91

Lenguaje: Spanish

Colour: colour and B/W

Master: Betacam

2.-Tierra Prometida.

Directed by: Marcelo Expósito

Production: Marcelo Expósito, II Bienal de la Imagen en Movimiento/Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Generalitat Valenciana.

Length: 05:47

Year: 1992

Lenguaje: Spanish

Colour: B/W

Master: Betacam

3.-Combat del Somni.

Directed by: Marcelo Expósito

Production: Marcelo Expósito, Maite Ninou

Length: 07:54

Year: 1994

Lenguaje: Catalan and Spanish

Colour: colour and B/W

Master: Betacam

The mother's land / La Tierra de la Madre

[Marcelo Expósito](#) | [Joseantonio Hergueta](#)

1993 - 1994

Produced by: Europe Premieres Images, GREC, Canal + Francia, Eurocreation Production
Frances Libertes, Consejería de Cultura de la Junta de Andalucía, Rijksakademie van
Beeldende Kusten (Amsterdam).

Length: 00:20:50

Production year: 1993 - 1994

Languages: Spanish

Subtitles: English

There is an extract in *The mother's land* of a British film news clip showing the seemingly "very compassionate" treatment that the case of the children exiled after the Spanish Civil war received. For this piece, Joseantonio Hergueta and Marcelo Expósito turn their attention to the dozens of thousands of children living on Republican land who had to be evacuated abroad in 1937 due to the advance of the coup forces. *La tierra de la madre* focuses particularly on what was to become a phantasm of the Spanish collective imaginary during Franco's dictatorship: "Russia's children". These were children who were sent to Soviet camps and schools and who ended up integrating in the civil life of that country.

One of the aims of the film is to counteract the media behaviour which, under the guise of compassion, hides the spectacularization of tragedy and the utter disregard for the origins of the conflict -- how would otherwise the mere outbreak of war have been possible? -- The story of the video's main character, Conchita Eguidazu, together with archive footage documenting these children's experience (film footage, emigration files, etc.), forge the testimony of their forced exodus. In addition, the postcards and letters that the children sent to their families, who stayed behind in many cases at the hands of the harsh Francoist repression, bear witness to the courage (and innocence) with which they confronted the necessity to survive in a foreign country: "Long live Russia! Long live a free Spain!", words that we can read in one of these correspondences.

Full of disturbing fragments such as the scene showing the destruction of Guernica and its confused inhabitants lost, disoriented, wondering among the debris and smoke (footage from Nemesio Sobrevila's film *Guernika* of 1937), this video closes the historic circle with the allusion (at the end of the protagonist's narration, as well as in the television archive images) to the collapse of the Eastern European socialist régimes, and the image of the massive exile of young Albanians to Italy.

In this work, war is neither nostalgic for the past, nor, of course, a photogenic accident with which to decorate our present good conscience. War, this war, our war, accompanies us. It is made present in this video.

Octubre en el Norte: Temporal del Noroeste

October in the North: Storm from the North-West

Directed by: [Marcelo Expósito](#)

Produced by: Producida para el proyecto de intervenciones urbanas *punte... de pasaje*, comisariado por Corinne Diserens, coordinado por Franck Larcade. Realizada con la colaboración del Instituto Francés de Bilbao, Arteleku (Donostia), el Centro de Imágenes y Nuevas Tecnologías (CINT) de Vitoria-Gasteiz y la Filmoteca Vasca.

Length: 75 min.

Production year: 1995

Languages: Spanish

Subtitles: English

It could be argued that *Octubre en el norte: temporal del noroeste* / *October in the North: storm from the North-West* is a video “about” Bilbao and its surroundings, as far as its format “quotes” those urban symphonies of the 1920s that portrayed turbulent metropolises like Moscow and Berlin. Although the piece seems like a complicated audiovisual collage, it is organised around one axis and two images.

The images are exactly antagonistic, one being the perfect negative of the other. On the one hand there is Bilbao’s Guggenheim museum, which, at the time when this video was being shot, was still the skeleton of a predator of brutal size. Only a few kilometres from this site, there are the overwhelming excavations of the (almost mythic) mining area called Las Encartaciones. This is a site that bears witness to the virulence with which the growth of industry and the steel and iron sector, and the consequent accumulation of capital by the Basque bourgeoisie, took place during long decades. In contrast to the authoritative volume of new architecture and its seducing undulations being erected, we find the gigantic hole in the ground where the mining village of Gallarta was once located.

The axis around which this piece is structured is at the same time geographic, temporal, historic and symbolic. Its thematic spine is the film that two local filmmakers, the Azkona brothers, shot in 1920 called Puerto de Bilbao (Port of Bilbao). It portrays one of the archetypal navigations through Bilbao’s Ría, from the metropolitan centre to the mouth of the Abra river, passing under the Puente Colgante (Hanging Bridge) which “joins” the Ría’s left and right banks. The same bridge “separated” the social classes, each on one side of the ría. This travelling is repeatedly interrupted by heterogeneous and sometimes unexpected material (contemporary filmings of the Ría’s area being demolished and reconstructed, archive images of labour conflicts during the de-industrialization process, music by Mikel Laboa, poems by Bertold Brecht and images by Eisenstein, interviews with film-historian Santos Zunzunegui and residents of Gallarta, the meteorological observatory at Monte Igueldo) that compose, during one hour and a half, a narrative made up of fragments, that is sometimes sinuous and others interrupted. A narrative that is littered with contrasts that look to reconstruct at the level of representation the memory of both antagonism and conflict.

When this piece was produced in 1995 the transformation processes of the industrial cities, such as the area of Gran Bilbao, were still uncertain. *Octubre en el norte: temporal del noroeste* registers these initial changes and reminds us that the work of the historian, exactly like that of the filmmaker, is a work of montage, of editing: it entails privileging a set of images and stories to the detriment of others, in the construction of narratives which are never innocent, as they seek to intervene in the present. The technocratic and nationalist apparatus chose to privilege an identitary and “numerical” discourse. This video chooses to bring to the front, albeit problematically, the vital and affective experience and the fight of the working classes.

Having Forgotten Nothing / No Haber Olvidado Nada

[Marcelo Expósito](#) | Arturo [Fito Rodríguez](#) | [Gabriel Villota](#)

1996 - 1997

Duración: 00:53:30

Realización: 1996 - 1997

Idiomas: Castellano

Public (un)memory and much more: the mythologic writing about the democratic transition that took place in Spain after General Franco's death. This is the critical focus of the video *No haber olvidado nada*, made between 1996 and 1997.

In their work, the authors, Marcelo Expósito, [Arturo Fito Rodríguez](#) and [Gabriel Villota](#), appropriate footage from film, television and diverse forms of propaganda, particularly images extracted from the Spanish television series *La Transición*, directed by Victoria Prego in 1995. This series was a successful audiovisual story, against which *No haber olvidado nada* presents itself as a kind of countermodel (a "pilot" programme of a planned series, which ended up being the only one produced).

With these images the authors produce an intelligent work of (de)montage. They manage to infuse a critical and subversive edge into the myths that the established narration about the process of the *Transición* contain in our mass culture and collective imaginary: the burial of the Generalísimo is set against the propagandist images distributed by the government during 1992, the year in which numerous ostentatious celebrations took place in Spain (Fifth Centenary of Columbus' arrival in the American continent, the Expo in Seville...); interviews with Cecilia and José Bartolomé, Eduardo Subirats and Juan Ramón Capella (filmmakers and political philosophers). In addition, the fragments of texts on screen manage to reveal the symbolic and political structure around which a specific architecture of power was built. This is an architecture inherited from the postwar period and Francoism, and whose continuity was made possible due to the more or less imposed silences, oblivions and (self)censorship during the *Transición*.

With this piece, which is over 50 minutes long, the authors accomplish an act of negation of the institutional narratives, something which could be defined as a "revitalisation of memory": an exercise in which art can become a tool capable of helping us see in another way, a more profound and perhaps more rigorous way. This primordial link between the artistic project and the impulse of memory represents the will to restore what has been excluded, to illuminate the shadow areas. Within the proposal of these three videomakers, the "artistic" is not a formal game, but rather an attempt to readapt our usual ways of "seeing" things, to attack, via its own imaginary and representations, the institutional formulation of the past and the present.

BETWEEN DREAMS / ENTRE SUEÑOS

ESSAYS ON THE NEW POLITICAL IMAGINATION

Between Dreams is a series of works that was conceived in 2002 and first expressed in the form of two videos produced in 2004. Its original declaration of intentions has continued to guide the project over the years: “a series dedicated to portraying the rise of the global movement and the new metropolitan social movements, against the background of today’s urban transformations and archetypal and historical representations of the modern city”. The objective that was taking shape below the surface at the start was actually rather more pragmatic: the idea was to generate representations of the events, processes, forms of action, etc., that were characteristic of the experience that we were then calling the global movement or movement of movements.

Between Dreams originally set out to find the precise, appropriate distance and point of view that would be required in order to bring about representations of the new forms of politicisation that characterised the current protest cycle. It began with the hypothesis that it could be possible to create representations of the current forms of political action from a position other than a merely descriptive distance. It was about considering the representation of political action at the same time as the politics of its representation; the public dimension of the politics of the event at the same time as its internal processes of subjectivation; the nature of its innovations at the same time as its historic roots; the politics of its forms of expressivity at the same time as its forms of action. A “participant point of view”, where representation is no longer seen as a descriptive mirroring, but rather as another way of contributing to the political and subjective processes that shape the movements, to multiplying its tools and modes of expression.

When work on the series began, the temporal *décalage* seemed appropriate: barely four years had passed since the events at [Seattle](#) (protests against the World Trade Organisation), three since [Prague](#) (against the annual conference of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) and two since [Barcelona](#) (cancellation of the World Bank meeting that was to be held in the city). The series made it possible to think about this political cycle at a point somewhere between real time and distance in time; the idea was to analyse the complexity of the new processes of politicisation, without being subject to the urgency of direct action, on one hand; but also, on the other hand, without approaching them as events projected backwards in history.

The passing of time and the new realities we have come up against have forced us to readjust our initial intentions. At present, it would be complex –and probably already impossible– to talk about something as stable as “a” movement of movements without adding a whole lot of nuances. At the end of 2009 it will have been ten years since the events at Seattle; the brief and extremely intense arc of counter-summits that started in Seattle and ended with the drama in [Genoa](#) in 2001 (when protests against the G-8 world summit were settled through an experiment in the controlled, small-scale production of a social war by the authorities and security forces), which coincided that same year with the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York and the social upheaval in Argentina on December 19 and 20, when the neoliberal formulas that had been applied to the letter for years allowed the whole planet to witness the collapse of a nation’s economy and the virtual disappearance of the control exercised by its economic and political power structures.

With the completion of the fourth episode in the series, a subtitle has been added to the series title: *Essays on the New Political Imagination*, to reflect the broader nature of its current hypotheses and formulations.

Marcelo Expósito, May 2009

(English translation: Nuria Rodríguez)

First of May (The City-Factory)

A videotape by Marcelo Expósito.

61 minutes, 2004. Filmed in Torino and Milano.

Italian, english and german, with english texts and subtitles.

Produced with the help of [Biennale BIG Torino 2002](#) and [3. Berlin Biennale für Zeitgenössische Kunst](#).

First of May (the City-Factory) is the first work of *Entre sueños (Between Dreams)*, a series devoted to the portrayal of the rise of the global movement and of the new metropolitan social movements, in relation to the contemporary urban transformations and the archetypal and historical representations of the modern city. This film articulates, at a first level, a critical dialogue with the way in which the Italian political philosopher Paolo Virno uses the metaphor of virtuosity to represent the condition of both contemporary labour forms and new political action.

The film explores a few clues that lead to an understanding of the passage from fordism to post-fordism. It focuses on Lingotto, Fiat's historic factory in Torino, which today has been transformed into a gigantic multifunctional centre. The image of this metamorphosis is the axis of a visual narration with overlaps urban change, the revolution in the productive processes and the radical transformation of the figures of labour, whose most powerful image is that of the dissolution of the industrial proletariat and the emergence of a confusing new social precariat.

The other side of the new modes of exploitation of labour is enacted in this video by the experience of the Milan collective [Chainworkers](#), a collective that has pioneered in Europe a discourse and a set of practices whose key tools for the subversion of the metropolitan space are self-organisation, direct communicative action and the reformulation of [MayDay](#).

The video is built with semiautonomous narrative blocks, comprising a montage of diverse material: film archives of different kinds, texts, interviews, music (Bach, Glenn Gould, Luigi Nono, Ultrared), oscillating between the tradition of urban symphonies (it cites Walter Ruttmann's 1927 *Berlin, Symphony of a great city*), modern political documentary, music-clip and agit-prop.

Radical Imagination (Carnivals of Resistance)

A videotape by Marcelo Expósito.

60 minutes, 2004. Filmed in London.
English.

Produced with the help of [Shedhalle](#) (Zürich), for the thematic series of exhibitions [Spectacle, Pleasure Principle, or the Carnavalesque](#).

Radical Imagination (Carnivals of Resistance) recalls the experience of [Reclaim the Streets](#), one of the landmark movements in the formulation of new forms of political activism in the 1990s, with their [radical and creative occupations](#) of “public” spaces in London and other British cities. This film focuses more specifically on the occupation and paralysation of London’s financial centre, the City, one of the main actions that took place during the [Global Action Day Against Capital](#) on the 18th of June, 1999 (known as J-18).

The video puts forward the argument that the type of *carnavalesque* political irruption characteristic of the RTS *street-parties* prefigure later forms of anticapitalist protest of the global movement. The piece shows the ways in which the protest’s *carnavalesque modulation* takes place precisely at the moment when translocal links between the different radical democratic and direct action struggles against neoliberalism are being established. The radical imagination of the new forms of political action consists in prefiguring the world wished for precisely at the moment of the protest, in the forms of the protest’s construction and expressivity themselves.

Masks, music, the body and communication are fundamental ingredients of the *carnavalesque* protest. The video proposes the following formal problem: how to represent a protest that operates on multiple focuses and thus, with its diverse ramifications and action fronts, completely breaks with the protest’s classic models. Visually it achieves this level of questioning by fragmenting the screen and through non-linear narrative forms which gather—in a montage of semiautonomous narrative blocks—interviews, music (Glenn Gould, Schönberg, Belaski), texts (Bakhtin, [Notes from Nowhere](#)) and diverse archive material (from cinema to painting).

Tactical Frivolity + Rhythms of Resistance

, 2009

A videotape by Marcelo Expósito and [Nuria Vila](#)

39 minutes, 2007. Filmed in London, Brighton, and Prague.

Produced with the help of Centre Culturel Suisse de Paris (for the exhibition [L'Europe en devenir](#), 2007), and the exhibition [Have the Cake and Eat it too. Institutionskritik als Instituierende Praxis](#) (transform and Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna, 2008).

In September 2000, several thousands of people gathered in Prague to counter the annual meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund: Seattle's long tail reached the heart of Europe and succeeded in interrupting the world's leaders encounter, taking the counter-summits cycle of the so-called anti-globalization movement to one of its landmarks.

Our former video *Radical Imagination (Carnivals of Resistance)* (2004) portrayed the Carnival Against Capital, the historical global action day, which reclaimed and paralyzed The City, London's financial district, and whose carnivalesque modes of protest pre-figured some key global movement's latter forms of street action. *Tactical Frivolity + Rhythms of Resistance* literally narrates the journey across Europe of "tactical frivolity" mode of protest, which turned into the "pink line", one of the three main (front) lines in Prague, which successfully broke the police cordon made to protect the international congress centre.

Tactical frivolity sought to undo classical *anarchists vs. police*, one-to-one confrontational tactics, by multiplying frontlines and making an extremely ironic use of femininity and kitschy representations of the body in direct action. Music and dance provided this radical redefinition of street protest not only with a powerful tool to practically dissolve or *détour* police violence, but also with the strongest possible image (and *soundtrack*) to realize how street demonstrations can become the unleashing of body's desires in the moment of protest itself. Rhythms of Resistance, the Samba-band formed in Prague, which continues expanding today its singular confluence of music and politics, is also portrayed in this tape.

Tactical Frivolity + Rhythms of Resistance is somehow a video about a particular moment of joy and expectations of the global movement. It also raises tacit questions about its continuities and how things have changed (or not) since then.

Not reconciled (nobody knows what a body is capable of)

Marcelo Expósito

127 min., 2009

Synopsis: *Filmed in Argentina, Not reconciled (nobody knows what a body is capable of) is a free adaptation of the drama Hamletmachine by the German playwright Heiner Müller, which was staged in Buenos Aires by the group El Periférico de Objetos in the second half of the nineties. The film runs through several historical moments at which tools derived from the tradition of the aesthetic avant-gardes were put at the service of the social movement, in the Argentinean context, and pauses to look at experiences like the “siluetazo” in the eighties, and the participation of political art collectives (Arte en la Kalle, Grupo de Arte Callejero [GAC] and Colectivo Etcétera) in the new Human Rights movements, and in the practice of the “escraches” (the public actions that locate and publicly denounce unpunished collaborators with the massacre perpetrated by the last civil-military dictatorship in Argentina), which the movement H.I.J.O.S. (Sons and Daughters [of Disappeared Detainees] for Identity and Justice, against Oblivion and Silence) began to carry out in the mid-nineties.*

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“Non-reconciliation is [...] a way of making films, of putting films together. It entails a stubborn rejection all the forces of homogenisation”

(Serge Daney: “Un tombeau pour l’oeil. Pédagogie straubienne”, 1975).

“In primitive and oriental music, when a theme is used in two or more voices at once, with each taking on their own form based on the different performers and interpreters, then as long their interpretative imagination is not blocked, heterophony will arise [...] If several people travel along the same path, or even if they just set off from the same point, they will be perceived as a unified group. Even if each of them moves in an extremely individual way, the perception will not change: one might walk slowly, another one may dance, and a third may even play the role of a pedestrian of the air”

(Mauricio Kagel, *Tam Tam*, 1975, commenting on his musical work [Heterophonie](#)).

“Instead of being producers of works, artists could become producers of projects that, by generating participation, would allow a popular aesthetic experience to develop and grow”

(Rodolfo Aguerreberry, 1993, on the *siluetazo*, also known as *la siluetada*).

“We don’t forget, we don’t forgive, we don’t seek reconciliation.” These are the words that usually end public declarations made by human rights group [H.I.J.O.S.](#), (Sons and Daughters [of Disappeared Detainees] for Identity and Justice, against Oblivion and Silence) generally in the presence of the (unpunished) persons who had been responsible for, or had directly collaborated with, the repression perpetrated during Argentina’s last military dictatorship. Formed in 1990, H.I.J.O.S. initially brought together (above all, but not exclusively) the sons and daughters of the 30,000 people who were detained and forcibly “disappeared” by state-controlled repression. The group, which essentially continues the legacy of the pioneer struggle of the [Mothers](#) and [Grandmothers](#) of Plaza de Mayo, and was also activated by the suffocating neoliberal hegemony of president Menem’s term of office under democracy, launched a new wave of politicisation among a

young generation. These young people proved to have an extraordinary, joyful and furious capacity for invention and creativity in the new forms of conflict – putting the body back in political action. The participation of art-political groups (such as [Arte en la Calle](#), [Grupo de Arte Callejero/GAC](#) and [Colectivo Etcétera](#), all of which appear in this video) in this revitalised Human Rights Movement is just one element of the way this generational innovation took shape.

The film *Not reconciled* (*nobody knows what anybody is capable of*) initially began as an attempt to look at how, in the specific context of Argentina, some of these groups would become a singular example of the kind of re-connection between art, politics and activism that was also taking place in other parts of the world. But over a period of four years, the project has outgrown this aim. It is difficult to define exactly what this film is “about” in the end. What we can say is that it traverses different moments and ways in which, in Argentina, the tools inherited from the thwarted utopias of modern and avant-garde art were updated and placed at the service of the reconstruction of social connectivity, civil resistance, the demand for justice, and the struggle for an active memory that fans the flame of desire and of politics of radical change (in the sense that Walter Benjamin sought: through the recovery of the memory of those things that they would have us forget, so that, in a sudden blaze, it can provide light in times of crisis, when a new danger threatens).

The film is ordered into five acts, adopting a structure that replicates German playwright Heiner Müller’s *Hamlet Machine*, which was adapted to Argentina’s theatre scene with something of an uproar by [El Periférico de Objetos](#) in the second half of the same decade, the 1990s. It starts by looking at the classic centre of Buenos Aires from the heights of the majestic [Hotel Bauen](#) (“a business without bosses”, recovered by its workers in 2002, following the neoliberal collapse). It reflects on the thwarted modernity of Argentinean concrete art in the forties. It stops to examine one of the most awe-inspiring examples of the participative socialisation of creative tools for collective production of images as a way of structuring social protest: the “*Siluetazo*” or “*Siluetada*”, which provided a singular multiple body to the Disappeared, beginning in the still-dangerous final months of the last dictatorship (1983). It questions whether the monumentalisation and a certain “officialisation” of the memory of the Disappeared could constitute a new space of conflict, where the things that those who suffered reprisals were fighting for are not cut short, and can continue in a different form.

Ultimately, the film aims to show that due to all of these elements Argentina has, for decades, been experiencing conflicts and struggles around forms of memory and justice, that are a model for the current situation in other places. In particular those places where the phantasmatic power of a former, bloody dictatorship continues to prevent us from implementing appropriate justice, a justice which might be based on memory that is not reconciled.

(English translation: Nuria Rodríguez)

143.353 (los ojos no quieren estar siempre cerrados) /
143.353 (the eyes do not want to be always shut)

A work of video installation and one-channel video by Marcelo Expósito (2010)

Video installation: simultaneous loop projection: channel 1 (40 minutes) and channel 2 (25 minutes)
One-channel video: 117 minutes.

Chapter 5 of the series *Entre sueños. Ensayos sobre la nueva imaginación política / Between dreams. Essays on the new political imagination*, edited by Oriol Sánchez, sound edition by Jonathan Darch and Jordi Juncadella, produced by the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid for the exhibition *Principio Potosí / The Potosí Principle*, curated by Alice Creischer, Max Jorge Hinderer and Andreas Siekmann (travelling to Berlín and La Paz).

<http://www.museoreinasofia.es/exposiciones/actuales/principio-potosi.html>
<http://marceloexposito.net/entresuenos/>

English translation: Elena Kizima.

"Where there is resistance, there it is necessary to film" (Serge Daney, with regard to Straub/Huillet)
"Others also have eyes and are astonished" (*The Antigone of Sophocles* by Bertolt Brecht)

On 8 October 2000 an unknown Emilio Silva Barrera published in *La Crónica de León*, a modest Spanish local newspaper, an article titled "My grandfather was also a missing person [*desaparecido*]". The article announced the intention of the author to open the anonymous common grave without an exact location, where his grandfather and another thirteen civilians were buried. They were murdered by Falange gunmen in October 1936, a few months before the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. This year, therefore, is the tenth anniversary of this minor event that would anticipate with time what nowadays we are living in Spain as a real psychosocial earthquake: the movement that names itself "recovery of the historical memory", whose two more obvious results are as follows. On the one hand, it gave rise to a wave of exhumations of mortal remains of people missing in the first decade of the repression period organized by the military men rebelled against the government of the Spanish Republic and, on the other, the public debate — that had never happened earlier in the history of Spain in such an intensive way, not even throughout 35 years of post-dictatorship and formal democracy that are between the death of general Franco and nowadays — on the necessity to investigate the truth about the precise mechanisms adopted by the fascist repression in Spain in 1930s and 1940s, to apply the justice versus the immensity of crimes committed — that cannot be qualified but crimes against humanity — and to offer reparation for the suffering inflicted on the victims during decades.



When a common grave is excavated, when the corpse of a disappeared person in Spain is exhumed, a powerful image materializes. The images frequently showed in TV programmes, journalistic reports either of literary or artistic style, usually put stress on the emotive shake that the meeting with a relative disappeared provokes in people. It is a way of looking for the empathy of the spectator or the reader through the sentimental identification with the families upset for sixty or seventy years over the crimes on which the last Spanish military dictatorship was based. But it is worth while observing the way how the process of graves location is commonly described and an exhumation is documented in the information channels that numerous Asociaciones para la Recuperación de la Memoria Historica [Associations for the Recovery of the Historical Memory] emerged all over the country have been provided with: on the one hand, the data are organized and expressed, in general, with obstinate enumerative exhaustiveness and the images narrate the story almost with distance and coldness; on the other hand, there exist a tendency to multiply the points of view, the number of voices that speak from the affective multiplicity but without being reduced to the mere emotional empathy. The effect of sense that this narrative mode produces consists of observing in a meticulous way a process that is needed to put together an infinity of abilities and knowledge, both specialized and informal, both written and oral (of local historians, old witnesses of the events, relatives and friends implied, forensic surgeons, lawyers, anthropologists, archaeologists, voluntary collaborators from all over the world etc.). What it is shown in this way is the complex and not simplified representation of the process that results in that one disappeared person returns, not to induce commiseration, but to implant one truth: that of his/her real existence; and to refute a supported negation: the denial that the collective Spanish memory seems to have self-imposed about the dimension reached by the crimes against humanity committed against professionals, militants, sympathizers, military men and left-wing civilians, republicans, revolutionaries, reformists or progressives in Spain during the decades of 1930 and 1940.

This is a method that affects the spectator conscience beyond any identification of humanist type: without the excuse of an emotive proximity with the victims, anyone who observes this process from a right distance facing the data and images is strongly interpellated in such a way: what attitude to adopt and what to do today facing this revealed truth?

The image of the skeleton of a Spanish disappeared person murdered as a result of fascist violence that is exhumed of a grave NN in any place of the peninsular territory perfectly resumes the apocryphal tension between Messianism and politics that chapter VI of Walter Benjamin's Theses "On the Concept of History" contains. Even being known, it is worth while dwelling upon it for a moment:

To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize "how it really was." It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger. For historical materialism it is a question of holding fast to a picture of the past, just as if it had unexpectedly thrust itself, in a moment of danger, on the historical subject. The danger threatens the stock of tradition as much as its recipients. For both it is one and the same: handing itself over as the tool of the ruling classes. In every epoch, the attempt must be made to deliver tradition anew from the conformism which is on the point of overwhelming it. For the Messiah arrives not merely as the Redeemer; he also arrives as the vanquisher of the Anti-Christ. The only writer of history with the gift of setting alight the sparks of hope in the past, is the one who is convinced of this: that not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.

The Benjamin's Thesis elaborates this unstable chain of equivalence: the memory is revolutionary as it rescues a fragment of the past that is in danger; this rescue, when happens, is transformed into an image that flashes suddenly like a spark of hope: a Messianic flash that redeems the present and simultaneously defeats the historical class enemy. And this defeat begins to be inflicted, to finish the story, just when one manages to pull what is to be remembered off the hands of the dominant class since it is menaced to disappear. The relation between past and present

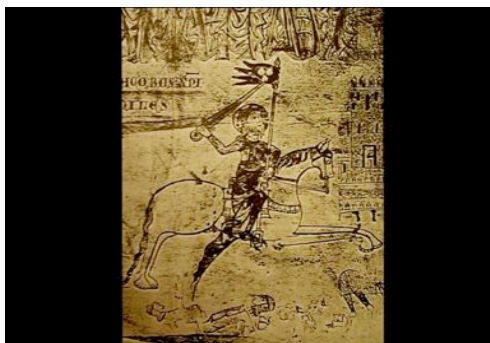
stops, therefore, being lineal, contrary to what the most vulgar historicism would like. Otherwise, the past determines the present so much as the latter has the power to extract of the past redeeming images or memories, whose evocation cherishes the revolutionary power, exercising this way a retrospective rescue that neither repeats nor imitates but actualizes the past in the present. In the interview included in our video Emilio Silva affirms the following: between the living and the dead exhumed, who in the past were made to disappear, a dialogue is produced. A skeleton reveals to the living some truth by means of an embodied language: a cranium splintered by a shot at a short distance, a wedding ring, a private keepsake or an evidence for the history pressed in a handle. Nevertheless, this language also includes a paradox: its own epiphanic dimension. Not always is it easy to perceive exactly what the dead express, or all what they could end up telling us. A memory that flashes in the moment of a danger works upon the conscience in the same way as it does the vision of a child whose head comes out for the first time at the moment of his/her birth or the contemplation of the corpse of a missing person that is brought unexpectedly to light: no matter how much it may be rationally known beforehand that they are crouched down there, hidden; no matter how much their arrival may be expected or have been announced or even looked for, just at the moment of their appearance a shock is inevitably produced: it is an epiphanic moment. This refulgent image speaks and at the same time it is ineffable: it produces an effect that seems to be on this side of the verb, in a stage different from that of the word. It seems even to be beyond politics, leaving it in suspense for a moment but without denying it: on the contrary, this shock is rather a hinge that articulates the relation between a previous political process, which causes it, and a later one, which this shock helps to break out in a determinant way.

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143.353 (*the eyes do not want to be always shut*) is a project initially thought as a contribution to the exhibition *The Potosí Principle* opened in the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in May 2010. The central topics of the above-mentioned exhibition (for example, the archetypical continuity of the process of primitive accumulation of capital between the different moments of the possible beginning of the modernity, and the inseparable interlacing of modernization and colonialism: that is, the exploitation and the genocide as basis of capitalist modernity) are supported by the following *modus operandi*: many artists and activists from different parts of the world were asked to realize projects that would answer a series of works — basically paintings — originated from several moments of the Spanish baroque or the Latin-American colonial baroque. In particular, our project simultaneously starts from the painting of the Seville-based Lucas Valdés *Santiago batallando con los moros* (*Santiago battling with the Moors*) (1690) and the painting of an anonymous author, dated back to the middle of the 18th century, which represents the Spanish King Felipe V under the characteristics of Santiago Matamoros. The first image is from the permanent collection of the Museo de Bellas Artes of Córdoba (Spain), while the second one belongs to the Museo Nacional de Arte of La Paz (Bolivia). The location of the images on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean makes possible to state the following question: How do certain specific articulations between power and visual representations circulate, updating in the (historical) time and in the (geopolitical) space?; and to consider this interrogation at the moment when the bicentenary of the independence of most of the current States-nations of Latin America is celebrated.

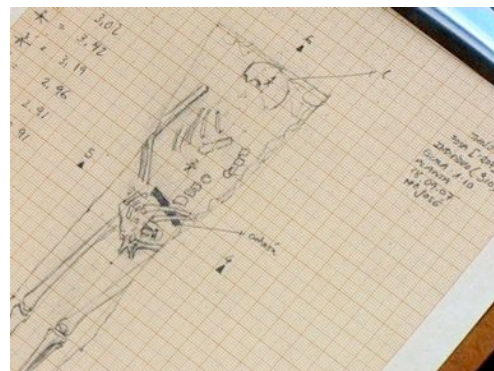
To interpret both paintings this project has made use of the principal tools utilized by the Spanish movement of Recovery of the Historical Memory in order to implement its peculiar "model Antigone". This model consists of multiplying the disobedience to both not written laws (the silence on how we should take charge of the magnitude of the genocide executed at the beginning of the Franco regime) and others really written (for example, this disobedience demands explicitly or tacitly that there should be revoked the way in which the Law of Amnesty dictated in 1977, only two years after the death of the dictator, has been imposed *de facto* as a "full stop law" [*ley de punto*]

final] or all kinds of individual responsibility in the political crimes committed by the repressive machine during the first years of the military dictatorship and its prolegomena during the Civil War), a disobedience that is effected by means of tools that are not others than the *excavation* and the *exhumation*. What would it mean, therefore, in this sense, *to excavate* in an image? What kind of truth does appear or return when an evidence, a fragment, a meaning previously buried, silenced or disappeared is exhumed of it? That is why we have decided to turn our point of view immediately to the original place of the myth of Santiago, the myth that has been for centuries the engine of a certain idea of the Hispanic world: this place is the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, erected on the enclave where hypothetically the apostle — the right-hand man of Jesus Christ, to whom the popular belief attributed even to be a brother of the very same God's son — was buried with the head cut and placed under one of his arms as a result of his Martyrdom in Palestine, after having invested long trips and years of dedication to the Christianization of the Iberian Peninsula. We have travelled to Compostela together with other several thousands of pilgrims from all over the world who are doing it during the current Year of Saint James [*Año Xacoveo*]. Having arrived at this fundamental enclave, our project initiates a long, sinuous and irregular transit to make us cross the historical construction of the myth of Santiago who helped literally to defeat the Moslems during the "Reconquista" of the Peninsula on the part of the Christendom. As original references we have taken the first known graphic image of Santiago Matamoros, as well as its sculptural representation installed exactly in the baroque altar of the Cathedral. It is where a vertical axis between the supposed remains of the apostle preserved in the underground crypt — below — and the God's eye in which the arches of the principal vault come together—above— is structured. We have tried to understand this way what the formal and symbolic archetype is (the vertical structure sky - earth from which the Soldier of Christ descends upon a white horse to help to annihilate the unbelievers and enemies of the Christendom; Santiago carrying a flag and a sword with which he beats cruelly, at a great height, from up to down, while he rides, who are seen wound by the mount, laid on the ground) that historically did of Santiago a "genocidal model" on having transformed into the *Mataindios* [*Killer of the Indians*] of the colonized America.





felipe V el animoso rey entre 1700 y 1746
primer monarca borbón en españa aquí lo vemos
caracterizado como santiago en un cuadro anónimo
de mediados del siglo XVIII conservado en el
museo nacional de arte de la paz bolivia





We have observed the meticulous work of cleaning of *Santiago battling with the Moors* by Lucas Valdés on the part of the restoration team of the Museo Reina Sofía so that the picture could be exhibited in *The Potosí Principle*. And, across the familiar affiliation between Lucas Valdés and his father Valdés Leal, we have dwelled upon the moment when the Spanish painting constitutes historically the epitome of the guidelines expressed by the Council of Trent to set up a use of artistic images that should contribute to the restoration of the catholic hegemony in Europe emerged in the conflict opened by the Protestant Reform. Iconographic apotheosis baroque of the Antireform versus Protestant Iconoclasm: the ideological struggle in the bosom of the visual representation. Of two classic pieces of baroque painting of Valdés Leal installed in the Church of the Hospital of Charity of Seville in 1672, the first one — *In ictu oculi* — quotes in its title a passage of the First Epistle of San Pablo to the Corinthians: "In a moment, in a wink, the dead shall be resuscitated incorrupt, and we shall be transformed", while the second painting, *Finis gloriae mundi* (*The end of the earthly glories*) represents a scenery of corpses and skeletons accumulated both in individual and common graves; the scenery that is appeared again in *La procesión de la muerte* (*The procession of death*) by José Gutierrez Solana painted in 1930. The fact that this painting was included in the Pavilion of modern orientation constructed to represent the Spanish Republic in the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* in Paris in 1937 could be easily explained because certain aesthetic eclecticism seems to meet adequately the aim that this pavilion had: to make possible that a great number of forces in the cultural field should come together to produce this way a propaganda artefact that would help to praise the public opinion and the help of the western governments in favour of the Spanish Republic which was fiercely attacked by the fascist military uprising from one year earlier.





enseñen con esmero los obispos que por medio de las historias de nuestra redención expresadas en pinturas y otras copias se instruye y confirma el pueblo recordándole los artículos de la fe se saca mucho fruto de todas las sagradas imágenes no sólo porque recuerdan al pueblo los beneficios y dones que Cristo les ha concedido sino también porque se exponen a los ojos de los fieles los saludables ejemplos de los santos y los milagros que Dios ha obrado y si alguno enseñare o sintiere lo contrario a estos decretos sea excomulgado



el pabellón tenía como objetivo ofrecer una visión entusiasta de la cultura española y de la política reformista republicana como contrapunto a la violencia que desató el golpe militar



Nevertheless, a more detailed observation of the artistic-political thinking of the driving force of the Pavilion, the young communist Josep Renau, appointed as General Director of Fine Arts of the Government of the Spanish Republic when he was only 29, allows us to extract some more complex conclusions on the following dilemma: the reason of the formal eclecticism — photomontages engraved in craft and folk art, abstraction along with realism, syncretism of modern and baroque styles — of a Pavilion that was inspired clearly in an avant-garde propaganda as radical as it was the semiotic architecture of the Pavilion of the Soviet Union for the Press International Exhibition (*Pressa*) in Cologne in 1928, a collective work designed and constructed under the guidance of El Lissitzky. A booklet — *La función social del cartel [The social function of poster]* — published in 1937 provides us with the key. Renau categorically participates in the debates supported by the progressive area of culture to find out the best way of contributing, through the cultural tools, to the support of the republican legality in the prolegomena of the Civil War. Renau strongly attacks to the heart of the common sense historically installed upon the relations between art, politics and social activism, according to which the progressive politization of

art should always bear the impoverishment of its aesthetic excellence. Excessive artistic practice within the political contest, overdetermined in 1937 by the pro-coup aggression to the Republic and the growth of the European fascism, according to Renau, supposed an opportunity, not for a simplification, but for a major complexity of the avant-garde language. Major sophistication that, in case of the Spanish propaganda art during the Civil War, should be achieved by means of the articulation of three elements or the conjugation of three different “raw materials”: the experimental achievements of the avant-garde in its previous autonomous phase, the efficiency in mass-media communication attained by the capitalist commercial publicity, and the peculiar local imagery of every particular nation, that Renau, in case of Spain, discovered in the baroque visual representation, finding, therefore, in the Baroque an effective historical precedent of art and propaganda articulation without prejudice. In our project, a visual common place of the struggle against the European fascisms, the *Guernica* by Pablo Picasso, stops being the essentialized icon of the aesthetic idealism to be returned to its context (it was one of the major works produced specifically for the Republican Pavilion in 1937) and to its condition of a propaganda artefact that, like Renau wished, syncretizes the structure of the baroque representation, the anti-naturalistic realism of the avant-garde language and the privileged dimension of the cinema as a way of mass communication.



This project, definitely, considers in an anti-idealistic way the historical polemic about the relations between images and politics. It proposes to explore genuinely the following: How do artistic representations constitute and how could they help in searching to constitute moments and specific material articulations of social, political and economic conflicts? It operates through semantic displacements between concepts and images: between the anonymity of the graves NN, where a great number of the victims of the pro-Franco genocide still can be found, and the pomposity that indicates the remains of the Patron of Spain; between the restoration to update the pictorial images by museum professionals and the political or cultural restorations (we propose to excavate in the image of the King Juan Carlos I — designated by Francisco Franco in the 60s as his successor to the State Headquarters — proving the comeback to the Spain of 80s — as a symbol of the democratic transition — of the *Guernica*, the picture that was originally thought to represent the massive murder of civil population on the part of the European fascist international, who intervened in Spain in support of the responsible for genocide general Franco); between the two components of the big double denial engraved in the Spanish socio-historical conscience: the classic colonial genocide and the modern fascist genocide.

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On 22 September 2008 the Plataforma de Víctimas de Desapariciones Forzadas por el Franquismo (Committee of Victims of Forced Disappearances during the Franco's regime) delivered to Baltazar Garzón, the Judge of the Audiencia Nacional (one of the Spanish High Courts), several lists containing the total of 143.353 names of people whose disappearance during the Civil War and the first years of the military dictatorship was possible to prove. A systematization of these lists as well as the application of standard criteria in the definition of the word "victim" and a strict temporal restriction, resulted in rounding this number up to 113.000. At the time when this project is being realized the Associations for the Recovery of the Historical Memory have located and excavated throughout the last ten years in the whole territory of Spain approximately 150 graves with the remains of roughly 1.500 persons. The excavation appeared in this project was filmed in 2007. It lasted two years over an area of 3.000 square meters of which 309 corpses were exhumed. This area is located next to the Monastery of Uclés, the historical headquarters of the Orden de los Caballeros de Santiago (Order of the Knights of Saint James), visited by the Reyes Católicos (Catholic Monarchs) in order to request help of Santiago Matamoros at the time of besieging Granada, last Moslem enclave in the Peninsula: from 1493 — the year after the capture of Granada, the expulsion of the Jews of the peninsular territory and the arrival to America of the marine expedition commanded by Christopher Columbus — Isabel and Fernando themselves managed this Order of Knighthood. In 1936, after the beginning of the Civil War, the Monastery was assaulted by the supporters of the Republic and turned into hospital of the 8th Medical Body of the Popular Army until the end of the war. It was in this epoch when the area of the bakery at the feet of the Monastery was turned into unexpected cemetery. When the forces participants in the coup took the area, the Monastery was converted in prison where political prisoners were interned: from 1940 till 1943 the death of 316 persons between the ages of 3 and 72 has been documented, of which 160 were executed by firing squad and 156 died as a result of the famine, ill-treatment, tortures and illness without having any medical assistance. The Association for the Recovery of the Historical Memory of Cuenca patiently exhumed them all, as the one who pulls, one by one, the arms of those who were thrown to the feet of the horses.

TRUTH
JUSTICE
REPARATION